

COLORADO CANYONS NATIONAL CONSERVATION AREA
Front Country Wilderness Working Group Meeting Minutes
February 28, 2003

Attendees:

Gene Arnesen	Randy Engle	Mel Lloyd	Jane Ross
B. Boeschenstein	Debbie Erbisich	Jack Ronzio	Bob Sherrill
Robbie Breaux	Wade Johnson	Judy Ronzio	Steve Yamashita
Lois Dunn			

Greetings and Introductions

Colorado Canyons National Conservation Area (CCNCA) Planning Team Lead Jane Ross called the meeting to order at 2:15 p.m. Today's agenda is attached.

Group Discussions

Trail Connections-Colorado Division of Wildlife

The Bureau of Land Management (BLM) would like to focus on trail connections in the Front Country, and Jane asked Steve Yamashita from the Colorado Division of Wildlife (CDOW) to comment. The CDOW does not want any trails in the interior portions of the wildlife area; trails need to remain on existing maintenance roads. The CDOW is not encouraging any access from the Horsethief Canyon State Wildlife Area to the CCNCA and would like to see signs posted indicating this.

Someone pointed out that the fence between Pollock Canyon Estates and CDOW needs signage that clearly points out that people are entering private property. Wade Johnson, BLM Interpretive Specialist, indicated that he is working with the Bureau of Reclamation (BOR) to revise wording on signs informing people that specific areas are not intended for access to the CCNCA.

Bob Sherrill directed an inquiry to Steve regarding hunting on BLM lands near the state wildlife area. Steve confirmed that hunting is allowed on BLM land, and any revisions to this policy are BLM's call. Target shooting is discouraged, but hunting opportunities will not likely change. Steve added that hunting is self-limiting because of the finite number of animals available for hunting in the area.

Gene Arnesen, CCNCA outdoor recreation planner, stated that BLM defers to CDOW on hunting policies and will continue to do so with the CCNCA Resource Management Plan (RMP).

Steve said that CDOW would consider restricting hunting if public safety in the immediate area became an issue, but this type of action rarely occurs since an objective of the agency is to improve and promote hunting activities.

Jane asked about current CDOW policies in other areas where subdivisions have developed adjacent to wild lands. Steve replied that hunting was an existing activity before the subdivisions appeared, but some restrictions could be considered if safety demanded it. Access in all canyons leading to the CCNCA is restricted, and the overflow parking lot near the gate to Pollock Canyon Estates is for the use of state wildlife area visitors only.

Bob commented on the size of the overflow parking lot, which allows parking for 18 vehicles. CDOW does not feel there are any parking problems occurring now, but the situation will be monitored. Any unlawful or suspicious activities falling under CDOW's jurisdiction should be directed to Shaun Deeney, that agency's enforcement officer for this area. The Mesa County Sheriff should be called regarding trespass issues.

Jane summarized discussions and emphasized that the recurring message is that resolving trespass issues lies in public education. The parking lot will remain but further signing may be needed. Hunting will not be addressed in the CCNCA's RMP, but CDOW might consider restrictive actions should the agency deem it necessary for public safety. The BLM will defer to CDOW on this decision. According to Working Group recommendations, target shooting (not to be confused with hunting) should be banned south of Interstate 70, as well as most areas of the CCNCA north of I-70. Jane added that the RMP will address these items, and BLM's management intent will be clearly documented.

It was noted by the group that a ban on target shooting is consistent with CDOW policy and city of Fruita policy as well.

Jane asked Bennett to continue discussions on trail connections and provide the group with a summary of Fruita's plans.

Trail Connections-City of Fruita

Fruita's trail plans are extensive, and the city feels that linkages with other community and agency trails in the area are important. The trail would extend from Dinosaur Hill to the Old Fruita Bridge. The bridge's restoration may be postponed due to extreme costs involved in making the bridge safe for pedestrians. Fruita has talked with the Colorado National Monument (COLM) about continuing the trail from Dinosaur Hill into the Monument via the old Fruita Dugway Trail. The Black Ridge Trail would eventually be connected to this system as well.

There is also a proposed trail system near the Kings View subdivision, but the trail will not likely be completed until the area is fully developed. Preserving trailheads to the

CCNCA throughout this area is critical because of the increased growth that is sure to come.

Fruita hopes to connect to the Kokopelli Trail system as well. The preferred route proposes connecting Fruita to Loma via a trail running along and north of I-70. Fruita is continuing to pursue necessary links to accomplish this system.

The Greenway Plan, which includes Mesa County as a partner, involves transforming two large gravel pits near the refinery into a system of lakes and trails.

The Riverfront Commission is actively involved in the proposed systems along the Colorado River and continues to develop trails stretching toward the Fruita area.

Snooks Bottom, if the land can be acquired, would be another part of the trail network, with potential for becoming the front door to the CCNCA.

Colorado State Parks is working closely with other agencies and offers the best river access in the area.

The Highway 340 boat launch is located on Colorado Department of Transportation (CDOT) land, but no agency currently manages this access. Bennett said that its future is uncertain.

Jane asked about dog regulations, and Bennett indicated that city of Fruita regulations would apply to its trail networks. Leashes are required within city limits, as well as in Colorado State Parks.

Fruita's trail system will be constructed of a soft-surface material, and mountain bikes will be allowed. Jane asked about joint trail maintenance, and Bennett anticipated that each agency would be responsible for managing and maintaining its own trails. Some may share maintenance responsibilities through a Memorandum of Understanding.

Randy Engle, Colorado State Parks, indicated that a grassroots organization plans to extend the Glenwood Canyon Trail west toward DeBeque. That trail may someday extend as far as Fruita.

Front Country Uses

Jane informed the group that the new BLM Colorado State Director Ron Wenker was in town this week and toured much of the CCNCA Front Country. The Director was provided with a thorough background of the area, along with a briefing on the RMP being developed.

Jane asked members of the group to talk about what kinds of uses they want to see in the Front Country, both now and in the future.

Dogs

A dog waste bag dispenser and trashcan are being installed in the vicinity of the Devils Canyon Trailhead, which will hopefully help with the dog waste issue. The group talked about free-running dogs. Wildlife harassment and respect for other trail users could potentially become an issue. Steve reported that late February-early March is a critical time of year for wildlife that survives winter on fat reserves that are now nearly depleted, and the animals are more vulnerable to stressors. Stress from dogs could result in death.

Horses

Horses and their waste were noted, but no one offered any significant comment on the topic. The terrain limits equestrian use in the Front Country, and while horses would not be banned, their use in specific areas of the Front Country would not be encouraged. A concern was raised about creating new trails for that user group, and BLM confirmed that no new trails are planned for any portions of the Wilderness.

Bennett expressed his concern with banning horses because of the positive experience that horseback riding can provide. Crossing Highway 340 at the Kings View intersection is a current safety issue.

Social trails create unnecessary impact to resources, and taking ownership of this area will be critical in helping the BLM manage the resource. One member felt that horses should be banned because of the frail environment, especially in the Pollock Canyon area.

Jog Strollers

The use of jog strollers is increasing in the Front Country, and as a mode of mechanized travel, this use is prohibited in the Wilderness. Jane asked whether jog strollers should be considered in the same category as wheelchairs, which are allowed in the Wilderness.

Hiking/Jogging/Running

Conflicts are not anticipated with any of these activities in the Front Country Wilderness.

Mountain Biking

Mountain biking issues have been previously addressed in the Front Country. At one time, the BLM agreed to allow mountain bike use in the Front Country, but as impacts to the resource worsened, BLM felt it necessary to close trails to mechanized use. Ultimately, the Wilderness area was created through legislation, ending any question regarding this use.

Some members expressed their disappointment with the closures, but next week's meeting will discuss Opal Hill and its mountain biking opportunities. The proposed trail systems discussed by Bennett will also help in providing additional mountain biking opportunities.

Randy pointed out that buffer zones are being created in this area, and these management actions have some people upset. Wade countered this statement by pointing out several areas in which recreational activities are allowed right up to the Wilderness boundary.

Trash and Sanitation

The BLM's focus has not included providing extensive waste removal services and/or toilet facilities. The increasing urban interface with the Front Country may result in changing this policy, and collaborating with other agencies may be needed to manage the increased use. Randy stated that if trashcans were placed in areas not convenient to vehicles, the containers would not see the abuse that those near roads receive.

The BLM is working with local schools as well. The principal from Fruita-Monument High School, who has been invited to attend these meetings, is very supportive of BLM's efforts in encouraging the kids to take some ownership in their local public lands.

Bennett added that the area is too similar to an urban park to continue to not provide some kind of trash containers. Today's kids do possess a strong environmental awareness, and the effort should be made to both educate and empower them to help.

Devils Canyon and Dinosaur Hill are considered to be the two key BLM Front Country areas needing toilet facilities. Toilet facilities in the vicinity of Kings View Road could be plumbed.

Concerns of Other Agencies

None were noted.

Jane asked to table discussions on Devils Canyon and Opal Hill uses until CCNCA Manager Greg Gnesios is available. Roads and local volunteer patrols will also be discussed at next week's meeting.

Bennett added that the city of Fruita prefers having a buffer area at the edge of the Kings View subdivision that would include Snooks Bottom, if acquired. Fruita envisions designing the Kings View Road entry off Highway 340 as a greeting point for Front Country visitors, and the city would like to work with others on this project. The improved intersection has already been designed and approved.

Jane noted that interpretation and education would be key to the success of this plan. People generally do not want to do the wrong thing, and if you show them what is right, most will make the effort.

Debbie Erbis, with the Fruita Chamber of Commerce, suggested that the BLM develop an outreach program as a way to educate both the general public and local communities.

The group agreed to meet next Friday at 2:00 p.m., at the Fruita Civic Center. The meeting was adjourned at 4:05 p.m.

Meeting Agenda

- Appropriate uses in Devils Canyon and Opal Hill Front Country
- Only non-motorized and non-mechanized in designated Wilderness
- Front Country uses might include but not be limited to:
 - Hiking
 - Biking
 - Horseback
 - Jogging/running
 - Jog strollers
 - Restrictions on dogs/dog waste issues
- Sanitation and parking
- Overflow parking/locations
- Other trailheads or access
- Local volunteer patrols
- Link trails to COLM and city of Fruita
- Trash pickup or pack it out